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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002737

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SUBJECT: RUSSIA-GEORGIA: FAILED BORDER CROSSING TALKS,
NOGAIDELI VIST, DETAINEES

Classified By: Pol M/C Susan Elliott for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary. Georgian Charge Shugarov said the Russia-Georgia talks on opening the Qazbegi-Larsi border post between Russia and Georgia failed because Russia insisted all legal documents governing Georgian border traffic had to be redone because Georgia had departed the CIS. Shugarov could not say why the GOG denied that the October 28-29 talks involved Russians. Russian DFM Karasin told Shugarov that former Georgian PM Nogaideli had not come with any GOG mandate to open new lines of communication with the GOR, but Karasin could not convincingly explain why he agreed to meet with Nogaideli in the first place. Karasin brushed aside Shugarov's concerns about the recent detentions of Georgians near South Ossetia, saying that this was what the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms had been created for. End Summary

Qazbegi-Larsi

12. (C) Georgian Charge Givi Shugarov gave us a readout on November 5 of the October 28-29 talks held in Yerevan on opening the Qazbegi-Larsi border post between Georgia and Russia had unexpectedly failed. Shugarov's sources were members of the Georgian delegation and an informal discussion (on the margins of a reception) with DFM Grigoriy Karasin. Karasin told Shugarov that Russia was only willing to allow Russians and Armenians use the border crossing, but not Georgians. He argued that Georgia's exit from the CIS had invalidated the legal documents governing cross-border traffic with Georgian people, cars, or trucks. Shugarov said Karasin could not explain why Georgians holding valid Russian visas were also excluded, although they could enter Russia by plane or ship. Karasin assured Shugarov that Russia was doing all it could to prepare the necessary documents to open the border post. The border post has been closed since 2006, and since renovated -- on the Georgian side with the help of U.S. funding, Shugarov noted. While Russia and Georgia agreed to meet again before year's end, no date has been set.

13. (SBU) Note: While Georgia issues visas to all Russian applicants, Russia only issues visas to Georgians to (a) visit close relatives, (b) conduct humanitarian work, (c) study, or (d) participate in international events such as symposia or sports championships. Russia currently does not issue business or tourist visas to Georgians. End Note.

14. (C) Shugarov said that initially, Russia had asked that the negotiations involve only Russian and Georgian representatives. Georgia declined, noting that all official contact between Russia and Georgia had to occur through the Swiss. Despite the fact that this form of communication is

common practice since Georgia broke off diplomatic relations with Russia, Moscow refused to accept the Georgian position. As a compromise, the sides finally met in Yerevan with Armenian participation, given Armenia's strong interest in opening a land connection between Russia and Armenia via the Qazbegi-Larsi checkpoint. Shugarov could not say why the GOG denied that the talks involved Russians.

15. (C) Shugarov noted with surprise that Karasin described the Yerevan talks to him as successful and useful, but at the same time acknowledged that they produced no result. Karasin also described the Georgian delegation as competent and well-versed, but criticized them for initially speaking English and using a Russian-language interpreter, although all present spoke fluent Russian.

16. (C) Shugarov said that Russian Border Guard Agency Rosgranitsa Deputy Director Maltsev headed the Russian delegation, although MFA 4th CIS Georgia Desk Director Pavlovskiy was the de facto leader. Georgian MFA Deputy Director for European Affairs Kakha Chitaia headed the Georgian delegation, with Senior Counselor Georgiy Zakarashvili from the Georgian interest section in Moscow supporting.

Nogaideli Visit

17. (C) Karasin told Shugarov he had agreed to talk with former PM and Movement for a Just Georgia party leader Zurab

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Nogaideli October 27 simply because Nogaideli had asked for the meeting. Karasin said Nogaideli had not come with any government mandate to open new lines of communication with the GOR. Nogaideli told Karasin he wanted to find a way out of the dead end of disagreement over the status of the breakaway regions, and that Georgia should speak directly with all involved parties, including South Ossetian and Abkhaz "authorities." As a former PM who covered economic issues, Nogaideli thought that economic cooperation and transport and communications were the most promising issues for discussion. Karasin claimed he asked Nogaideli how he wanted to achieve all this, given he was in the opposition, with no governmental authority. Nogaideli allegedly had no answer.

Detainee release

18. (C) Karasin brushed off Shugarov's query about the recent spate of detentions of Georgians by Russian FSB border guards and South Ossetian de facto authorities, saying that "these things happen." All he would add, according to Shugarov, was that the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms had been created to address this kind of occurrence.

Comment

19. (C) If Shugarov's reporting of Karasin's positive assessment of the Qazbegi-Larsi talks is accurate, it appears that Moscow could be playing a transparent game of claiming it wants to facilitate cooperation with Georgia, while doing everything possible to obstruct actual progress. Karasin's casual approach to the rise in detentions near the South Ossetian administrative boundary line also does not bode well. Beyrle